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SALT: taking up a Soviet offer

SALT

By Herbert Scoville Jr.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recently warned that failing a satisfactory SALT II agreement, the United States would have to spend an additional \$20 billion over the next five years on an accelerated strategic buildup. Yet in 1972 following the successful SALT I negotiation, the same Henry Kissinger supported funding to start the development of a new class of strategic weapons, the submarine-launched cruise missiles, as bargaining chips for the subsequent SALT negotiations.

These same bargaining chips are now a \$250 million item in the new defense budget and have become the most serious roadblock to the conclusion of any treaty at this time. Thus, we see a strange anomaly: spend more dollars for success in arms limitation negotiations and more dollars if our negotiators fail. Win or lose, SALT is escalating costly arms buildups.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's final 1977 budget for strategic forces jumps from \$7.3 to \$9.4 billion despite the assumption that SALT will succeed. Can we afford such success? Failure would call for additional spending. All this talk is probably only a ploy on the part of Rumsfeld to scare Congress into buying his current programs and of Kissinger to scare the opponents of SALT into going along with a next-stage agreement.

Rumsfeld's greatest security concern is the anticipated vulnerability of our Minuteman ICBMs when by the 1990s the Russians could have a large force of high-yield, accurate MIRVed missiles. However, his predecessor, James Schlesinger, had consistently pointed out the infeasibility of eliminating our entire force of 1,000 ICBMs by a Soviet first strike. Certainly, the Soviet leaders would never be able to be sure of a success — unreliability, uncertain accuracy, and fluctuations in readiness would always make such an attack an unacceptably high-risk operation.

Furthermore, he had pointed out that no attack could surprise our bombers and ICBMs simultaneously, and our submarine deterrent would be secure regardless of how vulnerable our ICBMs became. But now the Defense Department believes we must replace our Minuteman force with a new generation of missiles, the MX, which could eventually cost \$20 to \$30 billion.

Rumsfeld would prefer to forestall any danger to our ICBMs by mutual agreement, but will SALT in any way alleviate his worries? Unfortunately, in the present negotiating context — no! The Vladivostok accords of 1974 set a ceiling of 1,320 on the number of MIRVed missiles which we or the Russians could have. At that time the Russians didn't

have a single such missile and even now have only a small deployed force. Yet, when they reach the allowed ceiling, which was set that high so as not to stop any Pentagon programs, they will have more than enough warheads to threaten (at least on paper if not in practice) our Minuteman force.

Thus SALT, even if successful, will in no way reduce the dangers about which Rumsfeld is so concerned. Then why, if it fails, will we have to spend \$20 billion more than we are already spending? SALT will have no effect on the current high-cost items in the budget — the Trident, B-1 bomber or MX programs.

Only in the area of cruise missiles is there any hope that SALT can promote some restraint, but here the U.S. Government, and particularly the Defense Department, is dragging its feet. These erstwhile bargaining chips have now developed a momentum of their own, and as Kissinger himself lamented with naive disbelief, "I never thought the Pentagon would fall in love with them."

The Russians have proposed that all long-range, sea-launched cruise missiles be banned, but the Defense Department is reluctant despite its failure to make any military case for such weapons. Submarine-launched cruise missiles are inferior to ballistic missiles since their short range makes the submarines more vulnerable, and the missiles can be destroyed by anti-aircraft defenses. Furthermore, since they can be fired from torpedo tubes on any type of submarine or from launchers on all surface vessels, they make a mockery of any SALT ceilings unless they are banned.

The Russians have also proposed to limit air-launched cruise missiles by classifying all aircraft carrying them as MIRVed delivery vehicles, thus putting them under the 1,320 ceiling. This would restrain the program but still allow us to prolong the useful life of the B-52s, which could in the 1990s be replaced by a relatively cheap standoff bomber. We could then call a halt to the inefficient B-1 supersonic bomber program; more than \$1 billion is asked this year for just three such planes.

If Rumsfeld and Kissinger are serious about using SALT to keep escalating defense budgets under control, they should be taking the new Russian proposal seriously and not loading the budget with billions for a cruise-missile bargaining chip and ineffective B-1 bomber.

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